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SUBJECT: UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES SEES POSITIVE
STEPS FROM KAZAKHSTAN

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY POL/ECON CHIEF STEVE FAGIN FOR REASONS 1.4
(B) and (D)

1.(SBU) UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres and Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin signed a bilateral cooperation agreement on November 14 aimed at protecting the rights of refugees residing in Kazakhstan. The agreement had been under negotiation for the past two years. At a press conference following the signing, Guterres said the agreement is "very important not only in the framework of cooperation with Kazakhstan, but also in interaction with all of Central Asia." Guterres added that he was pleased to learn about Kazakhstan's efforts to move forward on legislation providing asylum rights for refugees. Guterres reiterated the importance of the legislation in his meeting with President Nazarbayev.

¶2. (C) At a lunch for representatives of local diplomatic missions, Guterres praised Kazakhstan's commitment on asylum issues. He noted that Kazakhstan has not recently deported any refugees. Guterres said that Kazakhstan wants asylum legislation which conforms with international standards, as the GOK recognizes that regional and CIS agreements, such as the Minsk agreement, are insufficient. Guterres reported, however, that the Kazakhstanis told him that they must be "sneaky" in working around these agreements.

¶3. (C) Kazakhstan's good-will on asylum issues, said Guterres, must be placed within the framework of the "unique pressures" it faces. Its two large neighbors, Russia and China, have a keen interest in Chechen and Uighur asylum claims. Moreover, Guterres stressed, Kazakhstan fears instability in Uzbekistan. UNHCR estimates that 500,000 Uzbeks will flee Uzbekistan if there is a severe crisis in the country. (Note: German DCM Juergen Keilholz stated that Kazakhstani Senate Speaker Tokayev recently told him Kazakhstan puts the number at 1,000,000. End Note.) The Chinese are particularly difficult on the Uighur issue, said Guterres, often providing information on asylum claims gathered from questionable sources. Because of these external pressures, Guterres sees Kazakhstan's willingness to finally sign a bilateral agreement with UNHCR as a very positive sign.

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